

History and International Good-Will

By HARRY ELMER BARNES

I

Woe unto us! professional historians, professional historical students, professional teachers of history, if we cannot see, written in blood, in the dying civilization of Europe, the dreadful result of exaggerated nationalism as set forth in the patriotic histories of some of the most eloquent historians of the nineteenth century. May we not hope that this will be but a passing phase of historical writing, since its awful sequel is so plainly exhibited before us, and may we not expect that the historians of the twentieth century may seek rather to explain the nations of the world to each other in their various contributions to the progress of civilization and to bear ever in mind the magnificent sentiment of Goethe: "Above the nations is humanity."

THUS wrote Henry Morse Stephens—by many regarded as the most brilliant American teacher of history in the last generation—in 1916. Developments in the last six years have not produced a realization of his high ideals. The entry of the United States into the World War led inevitably to an inflation of our nationalistic complex, which was reflected in history teaching and writing. Even at this peculiarly inopportune moment there certainly exists an almost unprecedented attempt on the part of various groups in this country to force the distortion of history writing and teaching in order to further their special interests. They frankly admit that they seek to displace the truth and to substitute therefor that which is "proper" and "safe."

In contemplating at least some preliminary steps toward disarmament and the elimination of the most potent immediate causes and agencies of war, the nations of the world are approaching what may be one of the most momentous dividing-eras in the history of humanity. War, for millenniums one of the chief disciplinary factors in the social and political education of the race, has now become its chief scourge. Yet it must be remembered that any action taken to reduce the material instruments of war will be of little value unless accompanied by a transformation of those psychological attitudes which constitute the generative factors in wars and in the preparation for wars. The historian who thoughtfully approaches this problem must frankly admit with the late Professor Stephens that the past modes of teaching and writing history have been among the most influential factors in creating belligerent national attitudes and in glorifying the nature and achievements of war.

In view of the amount that has been written upon the subject, few will need any extended argument to demonstrate the great influence of the chauvinistic and highly biased historical writing and teaching of the last century in creating the state of mind which invited the crisis of 1914. This important subject has been analyzed in such works as A. Guillard's "Modern Germany and Her Historians"; J. F. Scott's "Patriots in the Making"; J. H. Rose's "Nationality in Modern History"; and John Dewey's "German Philosophy and Politics." It requires nothing beyond a reference to those incisive indictments of ultra-patriotic history writing and teaching to convince the scientifically minded reader of the disastrous results which may flow from the construction of an exuberant national epic in historical literature.

The two chief defects in historical writing which may have been revealed by the above-mentioned surveys have been an excessive emphasis on national, political, and mili-

tary history—excluding social, economic, and intellectual factors—and an inaccurate and partisan statement of the unduly stressed political, diplomatic, and military history.

Germany has, perhaps, exhibited these conventional defects in historical writing more clearly than any other modern state. We have all been made familiar in the last decade with the German emphasis on political, dynastic, and diplomatic history; with the eulogy of military history, militarism, and the policy of "blood and iron"; with the stressing of the superiority of the Teutonic "Aryan" over all other races of man; with the fervid defense of the uniform rectitude of Teutonic foreign policy and insistence upon the equally unbroken record of perfidy and aggression on the part of her opponents, especially France and England. Professor Scott and others have shown, however, that French history teaching was nearly as biased, and the fact that Kipling is co-author of a much used English textbook of history would, if it were needed, be a sufficient commentary on the status of the teaching of history in English schools.

II

The American public has been sufficiently repelled by the excesses of Germanic historiography and political theory and has been wholly capable of detecting with alacrity the presence of the cloven hoof in the doctrines and practices described above, but it has certainly failed to be on its guard against the development of similar defects in our own teaching and writing of the history of this country. We have failed to appreciate the fact that some of our greatest literary historians, such as Bancroft, have been as buoyantly patriotic and partisan as Droysen, Treitschke, or Sybel. Bancroft and Palfrey eulogized the colonists and the Revolutionary patriots. Hildreth and J. C. Hamilton made no effort to conceal their admiration for the Federalists and their policies. Bancroft detected the voice of God in the pronouncements of Jacksonian democracy. Von Holst beheld in the anti-slavery parties crusaders in behalf of a divinely appointed task. Burgess viewed the victory of the North in the Civil War as a proof of our Teutonic political genius. Fiske eulogized the new capitalistic industrialism and urged us to accept the "white man's burden" by expansion overseas. Our so-called "popular" historians have been even more blatantly nationalistic and partial, and, with a few recent and worthy exceptions, our history textbooks in the schools have exhibited about the same tendencies as have been shown to exist in the German texts.

In the colonial period the chief emphasis has been placed on the wars between England and France, while the colonial period as a whole has been looked upon as significant chiefly as a prelude to the Revolution. The Revolution has assumed something of a central or pivotal position in the American Epic, and its prominent figures have, for an alleged record of unique private and public virtue, quite overshadowed most of those who have followed them. Once the results of the Revolution had been studied—and the formation of the Constitution was usually included within its consequences—the next subject of importance was the impressment of seamen, the embargo, and the War of 1812. The period from 1815 to 1844 seemed rather sterile, for about all that could

be found of interest in this period were the Indian wars of Jackson and William Henry Harrison. The Mexican War and its consequences in the slavery controversy served to carry the writer or teacher down to the Dred Scott decision and the preliminaries of the Civil War. The Civil War usually exhausted the historian, and courses and textbooks "petered out" with the period of Reconstruction, though, as a matter of fact, the events of the period from 1865 to 1920 have a more significant bearing upon our present problems than those of the period from 1492 to 1865. When a few pages were grudgingly allowed to the period since 1865, the writers found little place for anything save the Indian wars and Custer's Massacre, and the Spanish-American War. Upon this skeleton of wars was engrafted the history of quadrennial political campaigns, and the body of respectable historical material stood complete.

It is beside the point to urge that in the last decade a great change has come over American history writing and teaching, and that the better class of textbooks is beginning to subordinate military episodes and political scandals and to assign more space to social, economic, and intellectual history. Most of the present generation have had their historical views furnished by the older type of works. The newer and better textbooks are still studied by far fewer than peruse the older military epic, and a vigorous campaign of propaganda is being organized against these sounder textbooks.

The contrast between the arrangement and assignment of space in the conventional literary histories and textbooks and that which would be demanded in any adequate account of the development of American society can best be comprehended by summarizing the improved outline of the history of the country, such as, for example, one could find in Max Farrand's admirable sketch of "The Development of the United States." A rational survey of American history should attempt to make clear the dominant forces in each period of our development and should further indicate the dependence of these forces and tendencies upon the larger phases of the history of the modern world as a whole. The foundation of our institutions, as Professor Cheyney has well maintained, appears as a phase of that great movement which ushered in modern times—the expansion of Europe and the Commercial Revolution. The American Revolution no longer looms as an epic of deliverance but as the American aspect of the struggle which was going on in all Western society between agrarianism, despotism, and mercantilism, on the one hand, and the exponents of bourgeois parliamentary rule and the removal of commercial restrictions, on the other. It was, as Professors Hart and Van Tyne have insisted, a civil war within the British Empire, in which English and American conservatives aligned themselves against English and American liberals. The origin of national unity and our constitutional system is inseparably linked with the rise and ascendancy of the commercial classes and the origins of the industrial revolution in the cotton branch of the textile industry in New England, which, however, laid the basis for later economic sectionalism and the struggle over the tariff. At the same time, there was beginning that "rise of the New West" which Mr. Roosevelt has so vividly, and Professor Turner so profoundly, described. This was to bring into power the pioneer democracy of Jackson with its fear of the Eastern capitalists, its intelligible, if not intelligent, doctrine of the actual equality of men in political capacity, and its exploi-

tation by the Eastern politicians like Marcy in the interest of the "spoils system." But, for the time being, both Eastern industrial expansion and Jacksonian democracy were submerged by the clash of the sections over slavery, the rise of the "slavocracy" and its struggle for new lands in the Southwest to secure fertile soil for cotton culture and to preserve its equality in the United States Senate. Coming into active conflict in the struggle of the sixties, the Civil War proved by the logic of fact, if not of history, that Webster's theory of national supremacy was correct, rather than Calhoun's doctrine of State sovereignty.

Following the Civil War came new developments of unprecedented importance. The rise of large-scale industry and the railroad expansion, 1860-1875, were far more important for American history and government than the winning of the Civil War and the consummation of reconstruction. With the rise of big business came the consequent development of the modern party "boss" as the representative of the economic potentate. Finding it, as Jay Gould said, too slow and awkward a process to deal with individual legislators, the magnate made an agreement with a "practical political specialist" to deliver a majority for desired concessions and favorable enactments and against legislation looking toward the limitation of corporate interests and initiative. This "boss," so little studied in school courses in civics, has become the most important factor in American political life, much more active and significant than any of our formal and constitutional departments of government. The settlement of the Far West and the exhaustion of the frontier have created a new sectionalism. Just as Jackson warred against the plutocrats, real and imaginary, of his day, so the Westerners in the Greenback, Granger, and Populist movements, in the Bryan democracy and Roosevelt progressivism, and in the Nonpartisan League have fought against corrupt corporate activity and economic exploitation in railroad graft, land steals, timber and mineral grabs, and financial oppression. Finally, one observes the United States, after absorbing its expansive energy for a century on the Western frontier in conquering the American continent, follow after 1898 the general world movement of national imperialism and seek investment opportunities and political control in outlying districts, particularly in the West Indies and the Caribbean region.

The contrast between this summary of the newer orientation in American history and that which has generally prevailed in school and popular circles is a full measure of the progress of historical science and of the change of historical interest and perspective among scholars in the last decade.

Nor has American history writing and teaching been at all free from the second defect of German historiography—the biased and partisan treatment of foreign relations. The German discussion of Franco-German relations can be fully matched for virus and lack of objectivity by our analysis of Anglo-American relations. It has been remarked that in most parts of the country no textbook, however excellent in other respects, could be published with financial profit if it told the truth about the real nature of the Boston Tea Party. Without in any way attempting an apology for the British policy past or present in Ireland, India, Egypt, or South Africa, one might go further and say that no textbook would be a financial success if it told the essential truth regarding any important phase of Anglo-American relations. Should a textbook state that the colonial governors

were controlled and intimidated by the colonists' power over the purse-strings; that the perpetuation of smuggling and the dodging of English debts were major issues with the Patriots; that the Loyalists were as numerous as the Patriots and came from a distinctly higher social stratum; that the Revolution was really "won" by the victory of the Whig friends of America in the British Parliament; that the American view of the right of an Englishman to change his citizenship was shared by no other country in the period preceding the War of 1812; that the chief reason for the failure of England to effect an early repeal of restrictions on American trade in this period was the treachery of Timothy Pickering; that the United States gave out the Monroe Doctrine at British suggestion and was able to make it good only through the British warning of the European reactionaries; that England's attitude in recognizing the belligerency of the Southern States in the Civil War was admitted as the only correct version of the situation by the United States Supreme Court; or that in the Spanish-American War Great Britain was our only European sympathizer—should a textbook point all these things out the chance of that textbook running the gantlet of representatives of competing firms of publishers, or "patriotic" societies, would be slight indeed.

Or, again, without denying the remarkable French contributions to culture, what would happen to a textbook which told the truth about the motives for the French Alliance of 1778; that pointed out the fact that France opposed the liberality of the Treaty of 1783; that made it clear that France was one of the aggressors against whom the Monroe Doctrine was issued; that showed how the French Government did its best to secure armed resistance to the American occupation of Texas and the territory conquered from Mexico; that emphasized French treachery in the Civil War and the occupation of Mexico; that made it clear that the sympathy of the United States was overwhelmingly with Germany in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870; that brought out the attitude of American statesmen toward the French Canal Company and indicated the attempt of the company to corrupt American legislators; or that revealed the violent propaganda of denunciation of the United States which characterized the French press during the Spanish-American War?

Least of all would a book survive at present if it stressed the contributions of the Germans of 1848 to American liberalism; enumerated the prominent Germans on the Northern side in the Civil War; showed the American sympathy with Germany in 1870; or detailed the Germano-mania which characterized many college presidents and professors as late as 1912?

The World War has itself furnished one of the best possible illustrations of the futility of relying upon popular historical notions in interpreting international relations. The prevailing notion of the immediate causes of the war, sponsored also by some reputable historians, was that Germany deliberately took advantage of a petty diplomatic incident to plunge Europe into the war she long had planned. The political overturns in Austria, Germany, and Russia, and the capture of the national archives by the radicals in these countries, made it possible to secure immediate access to documents that would otherwise have remained secret for more than a generation. We have thus been enabled to form an accurate judgment as to the immediate responsibility for the outbreak of the war with the lapse of only an

unprecedentedly short period of time. Professor Sidney B. Fay, in a series of significant articles in the *American Historical Review* (1920-21), has sifted this new evidence and has shown that the immediate guilt lay with Austria and Russia. While no sane person could deny the sinister potency of the growth of the German military obsession in creating a belligerent psychology in Europe, there is no evidence that Germany wished or willed a general European war in 1914. Diplomatic carelessness and bungling, rather than wilful aggression, put Germany in a position where war was the only way out, given the existing patterns of diplomatic procedure and military strategy. The "Potsdam Conference" of July 5, 1914, has entirely evaporated, being revealed as a myth growing out of Wangenheim's over-stimulated imagination, which was not restrained by any Volstead Act at the Ottoman Court.

III

It would appear from even this brief summary of the characteristics of our type of history writing and teaching that we have in many ways the same problems in reconstructing our approach to history which we hold that the Germans should immediately solve. We have exalted our wars and military heroes to nearly the same degree as Germany and have been nearly as guilty as she has in distorting the history of our foreign relations with both ancient rivals and traditional allies. The degree to which obstructive politicians have been able to play with success upon popular historical prejudices in the campaign against the League of Nations and in the last presidential campaign is a tragic proof of the disastrous results which still persist from these causes, to say nothing of the strife and friction which have been thereby generated in the past.

The first and most direct manner of correcting the errors in American historical writing, which are due to a patriotic bias, is to tell the truth in regard to controverted periods and problems. This much-needed step has already been taken by the critical students of American history, who have practically completed the task of telling the truth as regards military, political, and diplomatic relations with Great Britain and other countries, though the facts and interpretations brought together in such a series of books as *The American Nation* (Harper) have not greatly affected textbooks or popular opinion. The other method of correcting these errors is to reconstruct our whole conception of the scope of history and the relative emphasis which is to be put upon different events and factors, so that the vital forces and institutions in our national development will receive due consideration and the controverted military and diplomatic episodes thereby lose their distorting influence by their very subsidence into that subordinate position where they belong. This phase of the twofold task has hardly been adequately planned as yet, much less executed.

Not only has our industrial history been neglected, but practically every phase of American history has failed to receive the benefit of that fundamental economic, sociological, and psychological analysis which goes below the surface and reveals the vital forces upon which all institutions rest. The absence of any systematic effort to produce an intellectual history of the United States is even more evident and deplorable. The vast majority of the writings on American history have been concerned with its constitutional and legal phases, yet these have been so superficial that when a certain daring scholar attempted to show the

basic economic forces underlying the political and constitutional development in our early national history, he was charged with near treason and sacrilege by Mr. Taft and the *New York Times*.

Gradually, however, through the reaction of the natural and social sciences on historical writing, a newer and more dynamic and synthetic history is making its appearance, and with its triumph over the older anecdotal epic there will disappear the more grotesque distortions of the conventional historical writing of the last fifty years.

If the World War has not hastened this movement of revision in our historical ideals and exposition, then we shall have failed to avail ourselves of one of the chief lessons it has taught, and will continue to maintain a peculiarly nasty stumbling-block in the way of any permanent international good-will and cooperation.

Vladimir Korolenko: 1853-1921

By AVRAHM YARMOLINSKY

CONCEIVE, gentle reader, if such remain in these dour days, of a world where rude Force bows before defenseless human Dignity, where the quotidian rack and the screw and the wheel cannot crush nor squeeze nor break their victim's protesting spirit, where, however troubled the waters run through the night, a clear candle shines from afar upon the callous-handed oarsman, a world where even the children are kind. Conceive further of a man moving in this world, among the familiar furniture of a perfectible society, and cumbered with the many cares of a public-spirited Martha, a soul as firm and sweet as a sound apple: lacking, peradventure, the fine foreign flavor of the pineapple, a remarkably round substantial fruit, nourishing, and succulent withal. Picture such a man, if you will—his eyes a little weary from having watched so many prisoners behind the lockless gates of famine and oppression, but still shining with a serene faith in the trinity of the good, the true, and the beautiful. And those old feet of his that know so many roads—leading through the bare Siberian tundras and into the mean Main Streets of the provinces—feet that were tireless on errands of justice and kindness. Take his right hand, the second finger a little lumpy from the pressure of his veteran pen. Do you see him now—Vladimir Korolenko?

With his passing passed not the man alone but a tradition of thinking and writing. There is a double death here. He was the last of that race of writers who used their talents as though they were homeopathic medicine chests, stocked with the poultices of pity and the cordials of kindness. It was these men who nursed the civic spirit and kept social ethics alive. As for Korolenko, he was one of the few who was not torn between the impulse of the artist and the fervor of the reformer. He was like a comfortable house, where the publicist and the poet lived amicably together, liking the same temperature and the same opinions.

The outside world is accustomed to regard the literature of Russia as expressive of a vexed, dissatisfied, probing spirit, rising in its search to ecstatic altitudes and tumbling thence to the depths of inspissated gloom—a morbid spirit this, and dangerous in its wanderings from the lighted circle of our diurnal desks and dinners and diversions. An acquaintance with Korolenko, and with his literary lineage,

which begins with Pushkin, would banish this misemphasis. This poised, cheerful, busy fellow was eminently what one of his compatriots calls a normative individual, with inexhaustible moral health and all the sanative insipidity of optimism. In a word, to use Herr Professor Nietzsche's convenient idiom, Korolenko shows us an Apollonian where we expect to find nothing but a frenzied Dionysian crew.

It belongs to the Apollonian character to possess abundantly the social virtues. And so Korolenko, believing in everybody's right to happiness, insisted that it must be a good happiness which includes one's neighbor, and not a bad, exclusive, each-for-himself-and-the-devil-take-the-hind-most happiness. He fought for this good happiness with the stubborn idealism of a Don Quixote. But he was a practical Don Quixote. He showed in his make-up an altogether un-Russian dose of tenacity and persistence. A great asset to the opposition, he never accepted its shibboleths and to the last belonged to no party. What mattered to him was not the minutiae of the agrarian program of the Socialists-Revolutionists, but rather the interests of the depositors of the Nizhni-Novgorod rural bank and the fate of a group of Votyaks accused of ritual murder. And whether he is describing the horrors of the famine of 1891 or a Jewish house looted by pogrom-makers or writing a little classic against capital punishment, he does it without raising his voice above an easy conversational tone, and with a sense for the neat, dry facts, as who might say: "I knew the man it happened to." The office of the country's living conscience, so long held by Tolstoi, was in time bequeathed, with all its attendant harassments and hopes, to Korolenko. A countryman of his called him the Russian constitution.

The characteristics of his forensic writing he carried into those of his works which properly belong in the province of belles-lettres. Even as a story-teller he clings to what is homely and familiar and reasonable, holding suspect what he called "the sly work of the imagination." He keeps aloof from the indiscreet prying of the psychologist. He has no patience with mysticism. He is as unexciting in his lack of perversity as a plain, wholesome, crusty loaf of bread. And as for demonism, there is no place for it in this eudemonist. His forte is the perceptive and retentive power, and indeed we have his word for it that he finds life worth living for his, visual impressions alone. Yet for all the keenness of his eye, he is apt to throw a little romantic glamor upon the scene, as the old Italians drew a halo around the head of some peasant Madonna. And be assured that the text of his account of life is framed in a commentary of kindness.

Conceive, now, of this man's end. Truly did it show forth the divine wisdom and mercy that Moses was not allowed to enter the Promised Land. Alas for the gentle, patient, conciliatory soul, fallen upon the harsh and violent days of a freedom he had fathered! In place of the candle that had shone for him like a good deed in a naughty world, there blazed a world conflagration. And so the superannuated man must needs comfort himself by retiring into the chambers of his memory and writing his "History of My Contemporaries," whereof he left the fifth large volume unfinished; and only the first two have been published. The second appeared just before he died. This work will take its place among the great personal narratives, and what was partly written in frozen ink and the darkness of destitution will yet offer the milk of human kindness and make us to lean upon compassion, the middle pillar of the house of man.